

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BISSAU 0997

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, SCUL, PU
SUBJECT: GOGB PRESS EULOGY ON THE DEATH OF POPE PAUL VI

SUMMARY: IN A LONG ARTICLE HEADED BY FRONT-PAGE PHOTO
OF THE LATE PONTIFF AND PRESIDENT LUIS CABRAL THE
GOVERNMENT JOURNAL "NO PINTCHA" PAID HOMAGE TO POPE
PAUL'S MEMORY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN AN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY LONG AND COMPLIMENTARY
ARTICLE THE GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER, "NO PINTCHA", RE-
PORTED THE DEATH OF POPE PAUL VI. THE JOURNAL NOTED
THAT HIS WAS A SPIRIT OPEN TO JUSTICE AND SENSIBLE
TO THE SUFFERINGS OF MAN. THE POPE, IN 1970, RECEIVED
THE LEADERS OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN THE PORTUGUESE
OVERSEAS TERRITORIES, AMILCAR CABRAL OF THE PAIGC,
MARCELINO DOS SANTOS OF FRELIMO, AND AGOSTINHO
NETO OF MPLA, WHICH THE JOURNAL CLAIMED STIRRED
THE HEARTS OF THE FAITHFUL AND CAUSED THE PORTU-
GUESE GOVERNMENT AND CHURCH HIERARCHY DISCOMFORT.
IN "NO PINTCHA'S" VIEW THIS MEETING UNDERCUT THE
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PAGE 02 BISSAU 00997 211201Z

PORTUGUESE MORAL ARGUMENT OF DEFENDING THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AFRICA AND OPENED THE EYES OF
MANY CATHOLICS.

2. LUIS CABRAL, PRESIDENT OF THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT
GUINEA-BISSAU VISITED POPE PAUL IN SEPTEMBER 1975
CARRYING TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADER THE GREETINGS OF

THE GUINEAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

3. COMMENT: THE GOGB DEMONSTRATED ONCE AGAIN THE CURRENT PRAGMATIC COURSE IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD AT LARGE. ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF CATHOLICS IN GUINEA-BISSAU IS SMALL, THE MEETING WITH THE POPE DURING AN EPOCH WHEN THE PAIGC WAS ANATHEMA TO A LARGE PORTION OF THE WORLD ESTABLISHMENT WAS NOT FORGOTTEN. RELIGION HAS YET TO CAUSE A PROBLEM IN THE NEW REPUBLIC. THE CHURCH NO LONGER HAS SCHOOLS, BUT REMAINS FREE TO MINISTER TO NOT ONLY THE SPIRITUAL BUT TO AID THE MATERIAL LIVES OF THE FAITHFUL. THE PRESENT BISHOP, LIKE THE MAJORITY OF THE CLERGY BEFORE INDEPENDENCE AND TODAY, IS NOT PORTUGUESE BUT HAS BEEN IN COUNTRY MANY YEARS. THE CHURCH IS SHORT ON FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES BUT LONG ON SPIRIT AND HARD WORK IN TENDING ITS FLOCK IN GUINEA-BISSAU. THE BISHOP HAS REMARKED TO ME THAT NEITHER HE OR THE CHURCH HAVE HAD ANY PROBLEMS SINCE INDEPENDENCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT EXCEPT THE NORMAL BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS AND THAT MANY GOGB MEMBERS, WHILE NOT PRACTICING TODAY COME FROM CATHOLIC BACKGROUNDS. ONE DOES NOT SEE GOVERNMENT MEMBERS ATTENDING MASS IN BISSAU'S CATHEDRAL, YET THE LEADERS OF THE JUVENTUDE AMILCAR CABRAL, THE YOUTH WING OF THE PAIGC, OF ONE OF BISSAU'S SUBURBS ARE ALSO ACTIVE
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PAGE 03 BISSAU 00997 211201Z

IN CHURCH WORKS. A DELEGATION HEADED BY ACTING PRIME MINISTER, CONSTANTINO TEIXEIRA, COMISSARIO (MINISTER) OF SECURITY ATTENDED THE MASS CELEBRATED FOR POPE PAUL IN BISSAU'S CATHEDRAL.

4. THE TRANSNATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE PAIGC, MANY OF WHOSE LEADERS HAVE ROOTS IN CAPE VERDE WITH ITS LARGE CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC POPULATION, SEEMS TO HAVE, AT PRESENT, ATTENUATED THE QUESTION OF RELIGION.
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